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NSC BRIEFING

20 January 1960

## IRAQ AND THE UAR

- I. In Iraq, a period of open competition among the "loyal" political elements opened with the legalization of political party activity on 6 January. So far, four parties have applied for permission to operate:
  - A. The National Democratic Party, whose leaders (including Foreign Minister Jawad, Finance Minister Hadid) have been fairly close to Qasim since the 1958 revolution. The party is leftist, but has become increasingly disenchanted with the Communists in the past 18 months.
  - B. Two Communist parties--(1) the orthodox Communist Party of Iraq, and (2) a splinter group centered about the editorial staff of Al Mabda, a lesser party newspaper, which recently accused the orthodox element of being "deviationist." The ostensible leader of the orthodox party, Ismail Bustani, is also an editor (Ittihad al-Shaab); the real leadership probably remains in the background.
    1. Pro-Communist Col. Mahdawi of the "People's Court" has announced that he will lead a "People's Party" as soon as he is free of his judicial burdens. This could well be a Communist front.
  - C. A Kurdish party dedicated to securing greater autonomy for the 800,000 Kurds, Iraq's most politically important ethnic minority group.

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- D. No "nationalist" parties opposing the Qasim regime have applied, and it has been made clear that they will not be permitted. Opposition groups are still plotting, with UAR operational support, but Cairo is not sanguine on their chances.
- E. The orthodox Communists, despite the split, still appear to be the best organized party; their most important assets are their ability to bring out the "street" in Baghdad and the large number of sympathizers they have in the government bureaucracy.
1. They could, however, be weakened if, as some reports allege, Qasim is backing the dissident Communists.
- F. The assets of the National Democrats are their ability to organize the peasantry and their position in the cabinet, where they hold four important posts (Fonoff, Guidance, Commerce, Finance).
- II. Nasir meanwhile is still having troubles in Syria, which UAR officials fear might ultimately grow vulnerable to Iraqi influence.
- A. Several members of the Syrian Baath party, including a UAR Vice-President, recently quit the Syrian government because Nasir curbed their activities.
- B. Another bad crop year is predicted for Syria, despite late arrival of rains. Tendency of Syrians is to blame Nasir for crop problems.
- C. Qasim has seized on Nasir's difficulties in Syria to launch propaganda offensive attacking Egyptian domination and calling for "liberation" of Syria.

2. Iraqi Communists are also reported to be approaching disgruntled Baathists in the hope of eventually overthrowing the Nasir regime in Syria.

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